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Family: Forms and Functions

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Preface

When discussing families, each person has his or her own ideas about what constitutes a family. In the various meetings and congresses relating to families and the International Year of the Family (IYF), two questions are almost always raised: How is "the family" defined? Is it possible or even useful to attempt a definition? It seems clear that, in the final analysis, family forms are culturally, historically and situationally specific. Therefore, rather than attempting to define the family, this paper addresses some related questions: What are the various forms that families typically take? What are the basic functions of families that are important regardless of the form of the family? How can families be supported and strengthened sos that they can better perform their functions?

To facilitate the discussion of these questions, this paper presents (a) a basic conceptualization of families, (b) descriptive information about the structures and functions of families and (c) some observations on how those functions might be strengthened through family policies, laws, programmes and services.

The paper was prepared by the IYF secretariat with editorial guidance from three senior consultants to the secretariat, Sirpa Taskinen, Barry K. Weinhold and Janae B. Weinhold. It is largely based on four essays prepared for the Second Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Meeting on the International Year of the Family of the United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, held 5-6 March 1992 at Vienna.

The essays were written by four eminent scholars: Laszlo Cseh-Szombathy [1], Wilfred Dumon [2], Don Edgar [3] and Luis Leñero Otero [4]. Their essays stand as individual statements, each complete in its own right. Although the essays have been frequently quoted, this paper does not attempt to exhaust all the views and ideas expressed in them. Copies of the original essays are available upon request from the IYF secretariat at Vienna.

The IYF secretariat wishes to thank the four scholars for their innovative and thought-provoking works. It hopes that the resulting paper will stimulate discussion of the topics and provide those involved in various aspects of the International Year of the Family with a useful framework for understanding what families generally do. Reader comments, ideas, suggestions and criticisms are invited.

CONTENTS

		Page
Preface		iii
Introduction: towards a conceptualization of families		1
I.	**Structures and typologies of families**	3
	Nuclear families	3
	Extended families	4
	Reorganized families	5
II.	**Basic functions of families**	6
	Establishment of bonds between spouses	6
	Procreation and sexual relationships between spouses	7
	Giving name and status to family members	8
	Basic care of children and relatives	9
	Socialization and education of children	10
	Protection of family members	11
	Emotional care and recreation of family members	12
	Exchange of goods and services	12
III.	**General observations on creating a family-friendly society**	15
	Knowing the level of family functioning	15
	The fusion of economic and social policy	15
	Building on the strengths of families	15
	Being aware of the diversity of family forms	16
IV.	**Concluding statement**	17

Introduction: towards a conceptualization of families

Families have been very different across societies and throughout history. They represent a wide variety of styles, structures and functions. Instead of always speaking of the family in the singular, it might often be more appropriate to speak of "families", since the forms vary within regions and through history, in accordance with changes in social, political and economic circumstances.

Families are psychological as well as socio-economic units. They form the basis of every society, since every individual has a family of origin and most people live within a family context for their whole life. The human infant needs the shelter of family during the time it requires for its development through childhood and adolescence into adulthood.

While families are of pivotal importance to interpersonal life and to the greater societies, they are also undergoing rapid transformations. Formalized marriage is losing its status, especially in European countries, where cohabitation without marriage has increased, at least before children are born. The number of divorces has been rising in almost all countries where divorce is attainable [5]. It is estimated that one third of all families are now single-parent families headed by a female [6].

The number of single-person households is rising in big cities. At the same time, however, and more often than ever before, people are living together either as married partners or cohabitants, for at least a part of their adult life [7]. In spite of the increase in divorces, the average length of marriage does not differ from that of marriages at the beginning of the century, owing mainly to longer life expectancy.

These changes can of course be seen in families as a sign of decline, but it may also be said that despite the many pressures and challenges it has faced, the institution of the family has shown remarkable vitality and resilience. Rather than indicating an erosion of the worth of the family, new forms of family life are developing to meet the challenges of the modern world and, in so doing, are struggling to find more effective ways of balancing individual rights and social responsibilities.

Families are constantly evolving. Changes occur both through external factors and the relationship of families to the society and through internal factors, as the family and its members pass through different stages of their development. A family changes when it gets new members or when they grow up, move away, die or go through other life stages or events. A family can be regarded as a system wherein each individual member affects and influences the others. Thus, the well-being or pain of one member concerns the others too. If one family member defines his or her role in a new way, it may change the whole family system.

The relative strength of a nation or a society depends largely on the strength of its families. What occurs in families affects the whole of society, and vice versa. There is a complicated relationship between the two. Many family conflicts are related to the problems families encounter in their relationship with the macro-society and to external economic and social conditions. Families have been greatly affected by urbanization, industrialization, ecological disasters, wars and famines and by political, economic or social changes in the structure of their countries. In most countries, social policies or family policies have been able to support families only minimally to compensate for these unintended stresses. Most countries still rely on the family to provide the basic safety net to care for its members.

It would be too simplistic to regard the problems encountered by families, or their solutions, as resting solely in the society or solely in the family. Society may be too easily inclined to see

the circumstances in a particular family (e.g. divorce or teenage pregnancy) as an individualized problem rather than as a problem connected to more basic conditions in the whole society.

Every family has its problems. Since development most often occurs through crises and difficulties, many situations need to be seen merely as a sign of an ongoing process and not necessarily as a disaster. The situation may require outside intervention only if the problems are acute and cannot be resolved by the family members themselves.

The ongoing process of family change and readjustment has always been a sensitive point from one generation to another. By its nature, the (multigenerational) family necessarily produces new family members with attitudes that incorporate not only past traditions but also new and not always well-formed values [4]. This invariably causes some measure of conflict between parents and their children.

Families can serve as agents of, or as obstacles to, change and development, notably in respect to social values. If families actually were "the smallest democracies at the heart of society", the whole world would be different. Today, this is not the case in very many families. Severe inequalities in the division of labour and in the distribution of power exist within many families*. The discussion of children as equal democratic partners in their own affairs has only begun. Egalitarian possibilities for both genders are but words in most families.

Despite this, there have been signs of improvement. In many parts of the world, the opening up of options for women, either through market work outside the home or social security payments, has challenged the power balance within family life.

Two questions now arise: How can the diverse forms, functions and needs of families be better understand? How can better ways be developed to support and strengthen families so they can actually become "the smallest democracies at the heart of society"? The complexion of the future world will depend on the answers to these important questions.

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*From a contemporary feminist standpoint, "the family is the primary institution for organizing gender relations in society. It is where the sexual division of labour, the regulation of sexuality, and the social construction and reproduction of gender are rooted. Gender hierarchy is created, reproduced, and maintained on a day-to-day basis through interaction among members of a household" [8].

I. Structures and typologies of families

Because there are so many different types of families, it is difficult to precisely define the family. It has been defined, *inter alia*, as "any group of persons which cares for a child" and as "a group of persons ... regarded as a family under the legislation and practice of a State" (United Nations Committee on Civil and Political Rights) [9]. However, these definitions, like many similar ones, do not include all families. For social and historical reasons, a type of family that may be quite acceptable in one society may not be condoned in another.

In this paper, families are defined in their broadest sense. Ties exist between individuals who are related through birth, mating or adoption. The description that follows is intended to provide a background for the subsequent substantial discussion on the functions performed by the various types of families.

It is not always easy to distinguish a family from a household, and there are many who would prefer the latter term. Although usually overlapping, these concepts differ in several important ways. The "household" is a concrete unit of people usually living under one roof. The "family" is a more abstract concept that is not tied strictly to one location or time. Families only rarely live together over their whole life cycle: children move out, spouses may separate and so forth. A person can live in one household but have some of his or her family members living in another household. Children departing and forming their own households do not lose their status in their family of origin. In spite of the external changes in life, families usually feel as if they belong together. Even when family members die, they may still be considered as belonging to the family.

What differentiates families from other social groups are the emotional, sociocultural and legal relationships between the various members:

- Spouses
- Parents and children
- Siblings
- Relative

In speaking of a family, there is usually reference to the existence of one or several of these relationships, which can also be defined as subsystems of the family, e.g. spousal or parental subsystems. Usually, these relationships are both genetic and social, but most societies have made provision for social parenthood even when the biological father or mother or both are not present, not identified or have ceased child-rearing activities for some reason.

Nuclear families

Nuclear families can be described as having two important forms: one biological, the other social. The biological element, the family "molecule", consists of the two parents and a child. An infant is born of a woman and has a genetic father. These two adults may or may not live together, but the child's biological nuclear family is defined by their union.

The social nuclear family is not necessarily the same and is created when two people establish a relationship, by marriage or by cohabitation. Many countries recognize this as a nuclear family whether biological children are present or not.

Modern Western families tend to create the biological nuclear family, where two generations, parents and dependent children, live together. Even if the children move out, the "empty nest" is still considered a social nuclear family. Statistics show that both forms of nuclear family, social and biological, are more common in countries where the life expectancy of people is high. They

are well suited for urbanized societies, since they can easily move and do not need large dwellings. While the nuclear family offers a number of possible advantages in some societies, the limited number of family members makes it quite vulnerable to internal and external pressures.

If the parents divorce and remarry or cohabitate with another partner, one can also speak of a reorganized nuclear family structure. These so-called step-families can be considered nuclear families containing a mixture of biological and non-biological children.

The biological nuclear family has additional variations. The most common variation is the one-parent family, which consists of a mother or a father and one child or several children. Single-parent families are formed through the death of one spouse, divorce, migration, separation, desertion or a decision by the partners not to live together. The various single-parent families differ greatly in their socio-economic conditions but often have more limited resources than two-parent families. Usually, widows are economically more advantaged than divorced or single mothers. Most one-parent families are female-headed, but the number of male-headed nuclear families seems to be rising in the Western world. They have, in general, a better economic position than female-headed units.

Another variation of the nuclear family is the adoptive family, particularly evident in societies where adopted children get the same rights and legal status as biological children. Families with children conceived through *in vitro* fertilization are usually considered as nuclear families, even if the social father or mother is not the biological parent.

The legal recognition of same-gender relations, as expressed in laws (Denmark) and court decisions (North America/Europe) on inheritance and other issues, is based on the growing social recognition and acceptance of such relationships [2]. This form of family also exists in many countries where it is not recognized in law.

Extended families

In many parts of the world, the "family" means a combination of several biologically related family "molecules". An extended family need not be big; it would, for instance, be small in the case of a grandparent and a grandchild living together. Usually, however, the extended family refers to numerous people either living together or otherwise having frequent, intimate interaction. In many cases, it is not easy to tell the difference between an extended family and a household.

A common form of extended family is the three-generation family, where grandparents, parents and children live together. Cultures that value respect and care for the elderly may be predisposed to the three-generation family as the most desirable form of the family. Such a family often exists in circumstances where the division of land and other property would diminish the economic possibilities of all family members. Thus the three-generation form is more prevalent in rural areas. With the growing shortage of housing in urban areas, many young couples have no choice but to live together with their parents. In such cases, the tendency is to view a household as containing two nuclear families, which break up when separate dwellings become possible. This situation is also encouraged by the tendency for urban dwellings to be designed around the needs of smaller, nuclear units. As life expectancies continue to lengthen, it can be anticipate that the four-generation family will become increasingly common.

Kinship families usually consist of even larger units than a three-generation family. In addition to three (or more) generations, other relatives may belong to the same household and be regarded as members of the family. The kinship family may disintegrate when siblings come into conflict and, above all, when there is a breakdown in relations between the father and children. The disintegration of the kinship family is less marked when married couples break up or when one partner dies.

Tribal families are usually built on a social rather than a biological basis. Responsibility for the care of a child may be taken up by several people. The biological mother's sisters may be called mothers, and the biological father's brothers, or in some cases even the mother's brothers, may also be responsible for fathering the child. All cousins, in the Western sense, are often called sisters and brothers. This type of family rarely leaves orphaned children, because there is an abundance of parents.

In some polygamous families, all of the wives (or, more rarely, the husbands) may or may not live with their spouse, in others, they do not all live together. Nor is the residence of the biological family is necessarily the residence of the children. Sometimes there are several allied family units under the same head.

Reorganized families

In all the above-mentioned forms of families, reorganizations can occur through the marriage, remarriage or cohabitation of persons having children by their former partners.

There are several forms of remarriage, or living together under common law, after one or several earlier relationships. One spouse or both spouses may have a child or children who may or may not live with them. The spouses may or may not have children together, either biological or adopted. In this way, children can have several half-sisters and half-brothers, "half-grandparents" and other non-biological relatives. These can be seen as new resources for the child. If there are several chained remarriages, or if remarriage occurs in an extended family, the interrelationships are even more complex.

Instead of formally marrying, people sometimes choose to live in a mutual support community, where several nuclear families and/or single persons might live together. There are also household configurations of couples or small groups of women who care for the children of one or more of them. In some cases, it is difficult to differentiate these forms of families from a household. Also, some children's institutions having a house-mother and, possibly, a house-father, consider themselves to be extended families.

The different family forms are listed in the table.

Forms of families

Nuclear	*Extended*	*Reorganized*
Biological	Three-generation	Remarried a/
Social	Kinship	Community living
One-parent	Tribal	Same-gender b/
Adoptive c/	Polygamous b/	
In vitro b/		

a/ Divorce is accepted in most countries.

b/ Legal status presently strengthened in only a limited number of countries.

c/ In countries where legal adoption is recognized.

II. Basic functions of families

Many different functions can be described to the family, depending on how its viewed. In this paper, which takes the view that the most prominent feature in all kinds of families is the interrelationships between the family members, the family's functions are identified as follows:

(a) Establishment of emotional, social and economic bonds between the spouses;

(b) Procreation and sexual relations between the spouses;

(c) Giving name and status, especially to the children;

(d) Basic care of the children and, in many cultures, of the elderly and relatives with disabilities;

(e) Socialization and education of the children and even of the parents;

(f) Protection of the family members;

(g) Emotional care and recreation of the family members;

(h) Exchange of goods and services.

The functions are listed here in no order of priority, because it varies greatly from one culture to another. In Western nuclear families, for instance, the affective functions, interaction between family members and mutual love are usually emphasized. The extended family is "... based on the principle of respect and loyalty for consanguineous bonds. Marriage is subject to such bonds and not the other way around. The role of everybody and each of the members is governed by their commitment with those of the same blood. There is nothing higher than this except God and the fatherland" ([4], p. 16).

The priority assigned to particular functions varies over the life-cycle of a family, according to the stage or turning point it has reached, such as courtship, marriage or cohabitation, the birth of the first child, the departure of the last child from the parental home, the end of the economic activity of the ageing partners, possible divorce and the death of family members.

Establishment of bonds between spouses

The first step in forming a family is often marked by the commitment of two adults to join their lives. Depending on the part of the world, this can be done by traditional rituals, by legally formalized marriage or by cohabitation.

Socially recognized relationships between spouses, as well as mutual emotions, form the basis for family life. The main responsibility for establishing these functions is vested, of course, with the families themselves, since the relationships are to a great extent psychosocial.

In addition to emotional bonds, marriage establishes social bonds between relatives of the partners. Legal and informal economic bonds may emerge as well, and marriages have been used throughout history to establish and reinforce wealth and power.

The laws and norms concerning marriage and divorce, spousal relations and the economic rights and responsibilities of family members are of major concern to any society. In common-

law marriages, the absence of such rules may pose a problem, especially when the relationship is dissolved.

To date, only 22 countries, most of them in the industrialized world, have granted equal rights to both sexes in matters of marriage, divorce and family property [4]. In other words, inequality between the sexes is still institutionalized in most of the world.

Most countries have laws establishing a minimum legal age for marriage to protect children from the problems of early matrimony. However, there are still countries where the legal age of marriage for females is as low as 12 or 14 years, or where the minimum legal ages are not always enforced. There are millions of child brides each year all over the world [6].

In some cultural traditions, partners are chosen by the family. This does not constitute a problem if the marriage is celebrated with the free and full consent of the future spouses, but such is not always the case. Attempts by the parents to arrange or induce the marriage of their children, in order to continue the tradition of alliances with suitable families, are now frequently rejected because they infringe upon the personal freedom of the individual. On the other hand, in modern societies, where no help or service is available for mate selection, youth might benefit from some guidance in selecting their spouse. Informal training for family life takes place primarily in families. In response to the need for more formal training, programmes in family life education are being offered by schools, churches and social agencies in some countries.

Marriage and its equivalents give the two partners their first roles in the new family: that of spouses. Over the years, both partners need to make constant efforts to develop a warm and well-functioning spousal relationship, regardless of the way in which it was established.

At times of marital dissatisfaction, people are generally willing to turn to advisors or mediators for help in making decisions that are in the best interests of their children and themselves. If the relationship between the spouses has become a burden for one or both parties, in most countries divorce or separation are a recognized alternative in most countries. Divorce almost always places an emotional strain on the family. Some experts have suggested that as the turning points of life are usually strengthened by rituals, at the time of divorce there should be counter-ritual to that of a wedding to effectively dissolve the spousal relationship.

Procreation and sexual relationships between spouses

Marriage and, in some parts of the world, cohabitation are the ways to socially legitimate sexual relationships. In areas where the use of contraceptives is accepted, sexuality is seen as distinct from procreation. Still, it has its biological basis and serves a vital function as a connecting link between the spouses. Sexual regulators such as incest taboos, courtship rituals and and religious and civil marriage laws are in fact social mechanisms for the control of sexual behaviour, and human history is rich with a variety of mechanisms for controlling sex [3].

Population renewal is crucial to the survival of any society. In many parts of the globe, programmes have been formulated and established to enable families to exercise the right to freely and responsibly determine the number and spacing of their children. Access to family planning information and programmes is vital to the health of families. In addition, information on reproduction is needed for youth to prevent unintended teenage pregnancies.

Technological progress in maternal health care has been able to dramatically increase the survival rates of babies and their mothers. Health workers and maternal health clinics have been major contributors to this increase. Research has shown that the health of both women and children can be significantly improved by spacing births at least two years apart, avoiding pregnancies before the age of 18 and limiting the total number of pregnancies to four [10].

There are many ways to promote prenatal, maternal and infant health care. One of these is to encourage regular contacts with health workers or attendance at maternal health clinics, where available. For example, many countries have granted financial support or greater benefits for a born baby if the mother regularly attended a maternity health programme.

There is a severe problem of discrimination in some countries where boys are more valued than girls. This is often reflected in infant mortality rates, which are considerably higher for girls than for boys in some parts of the world.

Pregnancy is an appropriate time to support the whole family. Parenthood is a new phase in the life cycle of the family and requires new ways of behaviour. It is essential to see to it that the adults are able to perform their dual roles in the family, as spouses and as parents. These roles differ crucially, and in order to preserve the basic relationship between the spouses, they should be kept separate. Besides being a mother, the woman continues to be a wife, and the man is both a husband and a father. In relation to their children, the parents should keep their adult care-giver roles and not burden young children as care-givers for their parents, as sometimes happens.

Parent training for both sexes provides skills and information to inexperienced mothers and fathers. Through counselling programmes or family resource centres, vital information concerning pregnancy, delivery, care of the child and the role of the parents can be disseminated. In particular, culturally sensitive programmes for responsible fatherhood are in demand all over the world. In societies where fathers assist in child delivery and undergo parental training, they usually develop close and warm relationships with their children. Studies show that all those present at the birth of a child are more bonded to that child. When the mother, father and other significant members of a family (grandparents and siblings) are bonded to a child, it is less likely that the child will be abused by family members.

In addition, the birth of a child entails economic burdens for a family and creates day-care problems for working parents, particularly in nuclear units. Since families are the institutions taking care of reproduction, in numerous countries their contribution is often acknowledged in the form of subsidies for the care of children. In many industrialized countries, a pregnant woman has the right to maternal leave with compensation and the right to return to her job after the leave. In some countries parental leave is also available to the father. In other countries, parents may also be eligible to receive a tax deduction and a child allowance until the child is self-supporting.

Giving name and status to family members

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex), every child has the right from birth to a name and to acquire a nationality. Indeed, children born to married parents usually automatically assume the name of the family and enjoy certain legal entitlements, e. g. they can inherit family property. Unfortunately, these legal entitlements are not universally available to females. For children born to unwed parents and for orphans and abandoned or adopted children, name and status often become a special concern. Children born to unwed parents should have the same rights as other children, and adoption laws should give adopted children rights equal to those of biological children.

In many countries, all children have legal rights to financial support from their biological father, even if they are born out of wedlock or from unmarried cohabitants. These rights are usually equal for girls and boys and include being eligible for inheritance from the father. If the child is born out of wedlock, the father may have to pay an allowance for someone to care for the child. In the absence of financial support from the father, the State may provide for the care of the child. In a case where the father is unknown or is contesting the child's paternity, a legal officer is usually appointed to examine the matter and establish (or not) paternity by a court decision.

The joint custodial care of children after separation or divorce is possible in many countries; this arrangement gives both parents the right to take part in decisions concerning the care of their child or children.

Basic care of children and relatives

Meeting the basic needs of children and other family members is a crucial function of the family. In many societies, the care of disabled or aged relatives is left to families. Without the support provided by the family, many sick, disabled and elderly persons would not be cared for. Even in advanced social policy situations, family members may be actively involved in gaining access to existing services.

Caring for children remains the most generally recognized basic responsibility of families, because the human infant needs a great deal of care in order to survive. Human development requires emotional involvement and interaction with the child as well as physical care. Parenting is important even after the pre-school age, during childhood, adolescence and beyond. Without adequate training and support, this responsibility can be too heavy a burden for many parents, particularly those who are separated from the support systems of extended family or kin. About 100 million children are physically abandoned each year by their families, many of them condemned to spend their lives on the streets engaged in hard labour or crime [11].

In many cultures, the old traditions of child care are no longer practised. Moreover, owing to the absence of an extended family structure, the older relatives are not able to transfer their knowledge or offer support to younger generations. Parental education is therefore most urgently needed when children are small and when they are teenagers, since the end of childhood is often difficult for both the children and parents. In the teenage years, conflicts with parents are almost inevitable; indeed, they are a part of the socialization process. These conflicts, if handled properly, can help the child to develop his or her own values and beliefs. Unfortunately, because many parents lack the skills or the understanding to properly handle these conflicts, many teenagers end up rejecting their parents as consultants and turn to peers or other adults outside the family for support and guidance.

As the employment of both parents and the number of single-parent families are increasing, day care for young children has acquired a special importance. Non-parental care for young children is nothing new, however. In most societies there have always been forms of day care for children, by grandmothers, siblings, other relatives etc., to provide the parents with time with survival and production tasks. What is new, however, is the demand for secure, controlled and professional day-care arrangements. While parents generally like public day-care systems, many would prefer flexible work arrangements that would allow them to be more involved with their children. Nurseries and kindergartens may also be needed for children in the evening at night, if the parents work at those times.

In some countries, one of the parents has the right to stay at home while the child is young, without being threatened by the loss of his or her job. The family may also have the option to place the child in a community-owned nursery at a reduced price or to receive a so-called home-care benefit. When the child is ill, one parent may be entitled to a paid leave from work. A child-care allowance for each child is also paid by Governments in many countries.

State-supplied social and economic benefits to help meet the basic needs of families may not always support marital bonds, although this is often unintentional. Opinions differ as to whether the benefits awarded married couples and families, including tax reductions and other subsidies, should be the same for single persons and cohabitants.

Caring about and for dependants traditionally has been sex-based. The care of children, the elderly, and physically or mentally disabled family members has been typically undertaken by

women. While it is generally the case that the distribution of family work must be the more equitable, when women take on additional responsibilities, such as working outside the home or caring for the aged or disabled, this need is even greater.

If there are many children and disabled or aged persons, or if the providers of the family are ill, welfare support services need to be designed to help the family in its household tasks, for instance by providing home helpers. In some countries, when the family is caring for an older relative at home, it is paid an allowance or compensated for the extra costs of this care.

Socialization and education of children

Families have a challenging task in educating and socializing their children. Even in times of financial difficulty, it would be short-sighted to reduce these efforts, because education is the main way to build up the future of the child and the society. In addition, it has been argued that society would not function very well without the contribution of children to the production of knowledge, through their their work at school [12]. Especially in education, equal rights for both sexes should be emphasized. For example, the level of education of the mother has been found to have a direct correlation with the health of the family, its size, the spacing of the children and the family's economic well-being.

The degree of responsibility of the family as the educator of children varies from one culture to another. Everywhere, the socialization of children is considered so important that societies have undertaken, in varying degrees, to formalize the educational process. Children are obliged to attend school for a certain number of years in most parts of the world, but the quality of the schools and of the education varies enormously. In many countries, institutional education is free and children are provided with the equipment and materials needed. In others, the family has to pay considerable amounts of money for the basic education of its children. Also, education has not always been seen as a right of the child, especially of disabled children. An estimated 120 million children in the world between the ages of 6 and 11 do not attend school. In many developing countries, one pupil out of seven drops out before reaching second grade [11]. This has a great psychological and economic impact on the family of origin as well as on the family he or she may eventually create themselves.

In addition to formal education, the family has to take care of the emotional and social upbringing of its children. It is in the family that the child's basic self-understanding and self-esteem are developed. The family is also responsible for transmitting social and cultural values. Traditions are learned and enriched in families; they are also altered by the everyday life of family members. For future families, the learned roles of mother and father, as well as husband and wife, are crucial. When children become parents they tend to repeat the behaviour of their own parents in child-rearing. Parental behaviours and traditions are very much part of the inheritance passed between generations.

In the socialization of family members, the role of siblings and other children is considerable. For example, the presence of siblings can diminish the influences of peer groups in day-care centres, schools and various free-time settings. Outside the family, the emotional and social development of the child can be promoted through specialized programmes, adventure camps, clubs, art, sports, care of animals and plants, pen-friends and other friendship programmes.

The impact of a child's behaviour on his or her parents' personalities should not be forgotten. Children also socialize their parents from the first moment on. Parents learn from their children about child development, peer and sibling relationships, school, fashion and changes in society. In particular, immigrant and refugee parents often learn their new country's language and customs from their children. Similarly, parents often report that the care and nurturing of children is personally and emotionally enriching, despite the attendant stresses and problems.

Protection of family members

One of the major functions of families is the protection of its members, especially those who are vulnerable, against all kinds of violence, psychological, physical, sexual or social. Unfortunately, violence and abuse do occur inside families, and at times family members have to be protected from one another.

In some ancient traditions, the father one had the right to decide if a newborn child was allowed to live. The paterfamilias used his power over his wife, children and slaves. While signs of this extreme form of paternalism still exist all over the world, males can also be objects of child abuse and family violence. The problem can be compounded across generations, since too often the perpetrators of family violence have learned this behaviour when they themselves were the victims of family violence.

Family violence has long been largely hidden; only recently has it begun to be dealt with more openly. It includes beating and other types of assault on family members, the burning of women in dowry-related disputes, murders, conjugal rape, female circumcision and the widespread sexual abuse of children. Emotional abuse and threats of violence also leave hidden scars on family members.

Modern studies show that most often violence in the family is directed at wives, and the most likely perpetrator is the husband. However, children are battered by both fathers and mothers. Additionally, elderly family members, particularly elderly women, are vulnerable to their grown-up children. Sick or disabled family members are more often the objects of violence than other members. In polygamous families, one co-wife may assault another, and in other extended families, female members are often at risk from both male and female relatives [13].

In some countries, criminal laws have been rewritten to include various forms of domestic violence, rape in marriage and the hysical punishment of children. However, these are still rare examples of the awakening sensitivity to the misuse of power within families. Only five countries currently have outlawed the use of corporal punishment on children by parents: Austria, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The law has been in effect for over 10 years in Sweden and has greatly reduced the incidence of physical child abuse [14].

Besides the more aggressive types of violence, there is also so-called passive violence. For instance, there are more neglected children than abused children. The rising number of abandoned and runaway children on the streets is a sign of the lack of capacity on the part of families to take care of their children as well as the inability or unwillingness of society to create an effective social safety net.

There are numerous programmes emerging in the field of prevention of domestic violence and child protection. Violence is an abuse of power and emerges from the desire to dominate, possess and control. In the long run, the promotion of human rights, better education and an improvement in the status of women are needed, as well as public education to change attitudes towards the domination or humiliation of other human beings. Studies have shown that adult abusers were usually abused or neglected as children. The treatment of an adult abusers, must therefore include counselling that promotes awareness of the abuse and neglect patterns inherited from the abuser's own childhood experience and that helps him or her to handle more problems effectively.

For families at risk, the most promising prevention programmes seem to emphasize and promote the strength and healthy development of individuals and families. Programmes offering immediate protection and short-term or remedial assistance include shelters, children's legal centres, telephones hot lines and therapy programmes.

Emotional care and recreation of family members

Families may be differentiated from other integrating groups by the emotional attachment of their members. For many people, home is the main place for emotional care, intimacy, understanding and support, but the emotions are not always positive. If relations are permanently hostile, overly possessive or otherwise tense, severe problems are the predictable outcome.

The emotional atmosphere of families is greatly affected by the sex roles and behavioural models in the wider society. There are also several myths, which are constantly being strengthened by the mass media, about motherhood and fatherhood and the roles of women, men and children. These written or implied norms have an enormous impact on the real behaviour of people. As circumstances and families change, such norms should change accordingly. Unless they are openly discussed and studied, they can become a barrier to healthy emotional development.

Even today, when a large number of women work outside the home, as mothers, wives or partners, they are still the primary managers of tension levels within the family. A woman tries to provide a nurturing haven for her husband and to give soothing reassurance to her children in the face of problems they experience at school or in peer groups. Working women are exposed to confrontations of their own outside the family, which they bring home as their own set of tensions that need soothing. This is certainly also true of women working in the home. When the emotional needs of women are not met and their burden of emotional care is neither shared nor recognized, they may come to deeply resent the emotional reliance of other family members. Some respond by withholding the nurturing care they previously supplied. Men are not always willing or equipped to provide nurturing, emotional support to family members. The sex-based division of labour in the emotional care of family members, like the division of physical domestic work, is a problem that must be addressed.

If there are aged or disabled members in the family, this adds yet another level of tension for the women to manage. In families where there is little extended family support or in single-parent families, women find that their tension-management function stretches them to levels that imperil their health and the equilibrium of the family. All members need to share this function within the family by paying attention to the problems of the other family members and giving them reassurance when stressful things happen [1].

In only a small minority of families are family members curently able to share this function. What typically happens in families where this emotional nursing function is not shared is that disinterest in and resentment of the problems of others eventually develop. This process is known as devitalization [15]. In devitalization, the tensions are not effectively managed, creating even more tensions for the family members, which can lead to a break-up of the family.

Sometimes the support of the family, relatives or friends is not enough to promote healthy emotional relationships. There are, however, other ways to do this. In many cultures, representatives of religious institutions, health personnel, counsellors, social workers, teachers or others are involved and helpful. In some countries, services such as family resource centres help families and distribute information on more satisfying and appropriate modes of family life. Both women and men need to develop effective communication skills to facilitate equal partnerships with families.

Exchange of goods and services

It has been argued that families have shifted from being units of production to units of consumption as the labour force has moved outside the family and members have taken up paid employment. Especially in times of economic strain, however, many families still retain their ability to act as units of production.

For most people, the family is the main provider of many basic services, e.g. cooking, cleaning and care of clothing, and of economic resources for daily living, education and recreation. These material resources, including shelter and housing, are vital to the maintenance of the family and its living standards.

As greater numbers of women work outside the home, their contribution to family income is greatly increasing. At the same time, the problem of division of labour within the family usually has to be addressed. Otherwise household work can, and often does, become a double burden for women, who are left to cope with it alone.

Time-use statistics on paid and unpaid economic activity and unpaid housework reveal that women still spend more of their time working than men in all developed and developing regions except North America and Australia, where the hours are almost equal [16]. According to egalitarian principles, the equitable sharing of domestic, parental and family responsibilities between women and men is an essential aspect of progress. To achieve this progress, schools may need to offer boys as well as girls training in the skills needed for domestic tasks and in rudimentary household management. For families at risk and in need of help with their domestic work, services such as home helpers, health visitors and respite care are in great demand.

In many countries, programmes are called for that would make it easier to reconcile and combine employmen. and family life. Remuneration, working conditions, hours of work and parental and other forms of leave all enable or disable families in their economic survival and child-care functions. The changing proportion of the time spent on work and that spent on leisure also changes the activity patterns of families.

The role of children in sharing household tasks and contributing to family income is a problem in many ways. In developing countries, children may enter the labour force at an early age, or they may have to do heavy domestic service. Over 50 million children are part of the labour force. They are often subjected to unsafe working conditions and deprived of basic education and a normal family life [11]. In industrialized countries, teenagers tend to work after school to earn money for their own consumption and to leave the household tasks to the adults. Within bounds, some participation of children in family maintenance tasks is not only helpful but can also be instructive. Alternatively, no family should measure the value of its children in terms of their contribution, financial or labour-wise, to family maintenance. A balance between the rights and responsibilities of children sometimes seems difficult to find, but it is critical, and there are many instances when the imbalances are extreme.

Family life is also dramatically affected by the back-up resources available to the family unit. Changes in national economies, unemployment and housing shortages, among other things, have greatly affected families all over the world. Some countries have had to develop economic counselling services for families who are struggling with debt. Separation and divorce have large impacts on family resources, notably the impoverishment of women and children. Public support for single parents and the enforcement of child maintenance laws often lessen adverse impacts on the living standards of single parents.

Having access to extended kinship networks is also important in many societies. The decreasing size of the family all over the world means that there are fewer people on whom to depend within the family. However, greater longevity often means access to three generations of potential support. Even when they live away from the common dwellings, family members may continue to be provided with financial resources. Income transfers between generations may flow in both directions; a household may have no children present but may be supporting offspring living, studying or working elsewhere. For example, a single-person or couple-only household may appear to have few family obligations yet may be supporting aged parents or other family members living separately.

In defining the goals of social policies, societies often consider the family as the provider of resources and services for its members. Governmental policies differ greatly with respect to the distribution of public funds to individuals and families. The fewer social benefits and public services available, the more individual welfare depends on the resources of the family, making it vulnerable to forces beyond its control.

A good example of how families have maintained a strong economic function was seen in eastern Europe. In the 1960s, when Governments eased the rigidity of the command economy and allowed villagers to farm small plots, families reacted immediately and started to produce agricultural products not only for home consumption but also for sale. In some countries, such as Hungary and Poland, private production on family farms quickly surpassed State-cooperative farm production in activities such as pig breeding. This private production was largely attributable to the participation of all family members in the farm work. In countries that are attempting to reconstruct a market economy, small family enterprises are emerging in all fields of work and are the driving power behind this transformation.

III. General observations on creating a famiiy-friendly society

All over the world, families are undergoing great changes. Although these changes differ from region to region, there are some commonalities: smaller nuclear families, an increase in divorces, the greater longevity of family members and the transformation of relationships due to changes in values and industrial and post-industrial economics.

Also, changes in the roles of men, women and the family itself are of great interest and importance everywhere in the world.

This chapter focuses on some general recommendations that can help create a more friendly society for all families. It is obvious that the reasons for family problems do not lie solely in families. Neither are the solutions to these problems solely in their hands. Families at risk should not be viewed as "risky families" but as "families in risky situations".

In response to the diversity of needs, Governments must develop effective legislation and family policies, services and benefits to strengthen those family functions needing the most support. This will entail forms of support that meet the particular needs of the country.

Knowing the level of family functioning

As a general requirement, policy makers must be aware of the state of family functioning in their national societies. Families, no matter what form they take, are called upon to perform basic functions in every society. Their ability, or inability, to perform these functions is one pragmatic and thus valuable approach to identifying unmet needs and isolating specific targets for policy intervention. This approach requires research and data collection to determine the level of family functioning in key areas and to identify appropriate supports and barriers. It may even be possible to evolve methodologies and measurement instruments that would provide a standard for cross-national comparisons in this area, including the quality and impact of existing supports. A cross-national comparative study on family functioning, modelled on the cross-national studies in the *Human Development Report*, published every year by Oxford University Press for the United Nations Development Programme, would facilitate exchange and provide Governments with objective measures of progress in family policy and benchmarks for setting national priorities and goals.

The fusion of economic and social policy

The experience of families, and ultimately their well-being, is mediated by a complex interplay of social and economic factors. Family policies must be formulated without making an artificial distinction between the "economic" and the "social".

When treated as a "social" issue, family concerns are too often isolated from the economic policy arena, where critical decisions are taken that have profound impacts on family life and functioning. Moreover, such a compartmentalization does not reflect the role of families as the basic units of production and consumption or their pivotal importance to the process of economic development.

Building on the strengths of families

Families, in their functioning, display remarkable adaptability, resilience and inherent strength. Family policies should reflect these strengths and the capacity of families to meet their

own needs. Consistent with this view, the levels of empowerment and consultation are standards against which family policies can be judged.

Families are expert in their own affairs and should be enabled, through participatory approaches and other forms of consultation and feedback, to be full and active partners in decision-making, policy formulation and the design and evaluation of services. It is important to remember that very few family units have ever survived on their own without some public, external support. This is the moral obligation that most societies regard as necessary for maintaining a civil culture. In different parts of the world and in different countries, the amount of intervention will vary considerably.

Families can and do function to the benefit of their members. Empowering social policy and participatory approaches extend that range of functioning, and family policy becomes another family resource. Public services that support and strengthen the family in the performance of its functions need a strong preventative focus, building on strengths rather than reacting to weaknesses.

Being aware of the diversity of family forms

Families come in many shapes and varieties, and there is change over the life cycle of individual families. A family-friendly society is one that recognizes the diversity of family forms and respects the unique conditions, benefits and disadvantages each experiences in the execution of its functions. The relationship between form and function is as elusive in families as it is in art and deserves the attention of policy makers and legislators everywhere.

IV. Concluding statement

Clearly much remains to be done to strengthen families and to find effective ways to support their main functions. To strengthen families, the combined effort of researchers, policy makers and families themselves is needed. The situation and needs of different families must be assessed, and existing services, laws and benefits must be evaluated.

A functionalist view of families is but one perspective on this complex and vital part of the human experience. From the point of view of policy, however, and within the purview of the International Year of the Family, such a perspective may offer much. First, it strives to identify commonalities between families, across forms, cultures and time. These commonalities are, furthermore, defined around what families do, as part of the lived experience of family life. Moreover, a functionalist perspective focuses on that aspect of the family that is most significant for policy - its irreplaceable function of providing for the multiplex and changing needs of family members. A functionalist yet dynamic view of families seems to capture much of what is meant when it is said that family is the basic unit of every society.

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